

“Why Communion is so Important” Part 3 - 1 Corinthians 11:29-34 – November 1st, 2015

- Today's teaching will be part three of a series I've titled, "Why Communion is so Important."
- We bring chapter 11 to an end, with a serious situation that takes place in the church of Corinth surrounding the Lord's Table.
- Namely, that some were weak and sick, while a number of Corinthians had died as a result of not discerning the body of Christ.

- It seems the Corinthian Christians in their selfish carnality had disgraced and even diminished the importance of communion.
- This because they no longer understood the importance of what the Lord's Table was all about namely, a union in Jesus Christ.
- Because it's germane to our understanding of today's text, I'll quickly recap the first four reasons communion is so important.

1. It's a revelation of those whom God approves (Verses 17-19)

- Paul says they're doing more harm than good, and the divisions among them show them which of them have God's approval.

2. It's a unification of the body of Christ (Verses 20-22)

- Here Paul rebukes them for eating in small groups, which resulted in some remaining hungry while others were getting drunk.

3. It's a commemoration of what Jesus did for us (Verses 23-25)

- Paul reminds them of Jesus telling the disciples to remember Him whenever they are breaking the bread and drinking the cup.

4. It's a proclamation of the Lord's death until He returns (Verses 26-28)

- Paul says we proclaim the Lord's death when we partake and we ought to examine ourselves before lest we do so unworthily.

5. It's a condemnation on those without discernment (Verses 29-31)

- v29 Paul says that those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, will eat and drink judgment on themselves.
- v30 He says that it's for this reason that many among them were weak and sick, and it's also why a number of them had died.
- v31 He then tells them that in order to not come under such judgment, they are to be more discerning with regard to themselves.

- What Paul is saying here concerning them not discerning the body of Christ is they were insensitive to their fellow Christians.
- In other words, they were failing to realize every Christian, whether rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, are part of the body of Christ.
- As such, Jesus loves every one of them in the same way, which is why they had been judged for mistreating the body of Christ.

- I have to confess that it's hard to imagine this rising to the level of God putting some on a bed of sickness and some to death.
- However, it's important to realize that they came under such judgment because of the threat they posed to the body of Christ.
- So much so, that if being on a bed of sickness wasn't enough to get their attention, then God would have to take them home.

- Lest we misunderstand what is happening here, let me hasten to say that sickness is not usually a result of God's judgment.
- Often times, sickness and especially death are the result of living in a fallen world, and not because God is judging us for a sin.
- However, there does come a time when God will deem it necessary to take someone home if they pose a threat to His church.

Gayle Erwin wrote what I would argue is one of the best, if not the best articles I've ever read about communion, and of this said, "the "early church" in Corinth violated the use of communion seriously. So seriously that Paul warned them that they would be condemning themselves and that many of them had become sick, weak and had even died because of their misuse of communion. ...it was because they were not recognizing who their brothers and sisters were. Paul told them to examine themselves; i.e., look into their hearts and see whom they were excluding from the kingdom or their brotherhood. Any time we don't recognize our brothers, we maim the body of Christ."

http://www.servant.org/writings/articles/p_comm.php

6. It's a provocation to avoid God's judgment (Verses 32-34)

- v32 Paul says when we're judged in this way, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.
- v33 He then tells them as his brothers and sisters that they should all eat together as one when they gather for the Lord's Table.
- v34 He says to eat at home to avoid judgment when they meet together, and that he will give further directions when he comes.

- What Paul is saying is the aforementioned judgment is avoidable if they meet and eat together as they gather for communion.
- One would think that this would be a firm grasp of the obvious however; they deliberately refused to eat with the common slave.
- This because the culture was such that eating together with someone formed an intimate and unbreakable bond between them.

- Perhaps you'll indulge me for a moment as I answer some of the questions that frequently come up as it relates to communion.
- The first question has to do with children, namely, "What age should children be permitted to partake of the communion Table?"
- The second question has to do with the non-believers, "should non-believers be permitted to partake of the communion Table?"

For the answers to both questions, I'll again quote Gayle Erwin starting with children partaking of communion, "...communion is not a "reward" for having reached a certain age or joined a certain church. ...Often people ask me at what age they should permit their children to participate in communion. The answer is simply, "At whatever age you want them to remember Jesus."

As for non-believers partaking, Gayle again has the best answer, "...people have asked me if we should let non-believers participate in communion and I have heard preachers urge nonbelievers to refuse to participate. Why would a non-believer want to participate, anyway? Who are we to tell them not to do it, anyway? Maybe this is the nonbeliever's way of saying "I now believe." I have come to the conclusion that by the grace of God, I will never say "No." I want to keep the hand of invitation extended. If we have the keys to the kingdom, let us use them to open up the door. Freely we have received, let us freely give."